

Transgender Woman Claims Local Non-Profit Reliable Street Retaliated Against Her for Filing a Civil Rights Complaint:

Ames community members are looking for answers after local artist and DMACC student, Sondra Wilson, filed a complaint with the Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) that was dismissed “because two people wrote extremely damaging lies” about her in their statements to the Commission. She feels the commission didn't investigate the case closely enough, and instead closed the case prematurely.

Below are some redacted statements Reliable Street's CEO and her friend made to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission.

Complainant wanted to raise money to buy the seed for the prairie but never did, instead she asked [REDACTED] and others for donations for it. [REDACTED] states

Despite the above comment, Wilson possesses a receipt from when she sent money to the CEO for prairie seeds. Additionally an employee from Lockwood volunteered to match Wilson's payment because she, too, was passionate about prairie restoration. Wilson also has evidence of this.

The above statement, however, is more benign than the CEO's other accusations of “stalking” and “harassment” – both of which are serious crimes:

[REDACTED]. In addition, [REDACTED] states Complainant had become “obsessed” with [REDACTED] to the extent that Complainant was stalking and harassing her.

Wilson claims the following statements filed by the CEO's friend are also false:

[REDACTED] In a statement, a patron alleges he witnessed Complainant make racially insensitive comments, and Complainant harassing staff at the café, including asking them, other patrons, and even the high school students in SHEPH for money for the garden projects. The patron alleges Complainant harassed him by texting and calling him and numerous others in the community, multiple times a day.

“The CEO's friend makes it sound like they're a customer who witnessed me do these things,” Wilson said. “Last I heard this person has an art studio on the property and sells art there – so that is a pretty misleading statement they made to the Commission. When I appealed the Commission's decision to close the case, I feel they should have investigated these things further.”

Wilson isn't convinced Lockwood employees even know these things were written about them, “Community members and Lockwood Cafe's staff would be upset if they knew what they wrote about me to the Commission because they know it isn't true. Friends have told me that when they asked Reliable Street what is going on, they concealed the fact that they wrote these statements about me. I want those people to know the truth.”

Wilson claims the owner of Lockwood Cafe appears to have stated the truth to the Commission, and that, “It is possible she doesn't know about these other statements that were submitted to the Commission. I believe she would be upset by these statements.”

“I believe that in retaliation for me filing a legitimate complaint, the CEO and her friend wrote these lies into the state record in order to politically attack me in the future, and to threaten

me – in an underhanded way – not to mess with them. By lying to ICRC they not only committed fraud, they falsely accused a transgender woman of stalking and harassing other women. Many LGBT+ people support these businesses, and would be very upset if they saw the bigger picture. Its against everything Reliable Street claims to stand for.”

Prior to filing with the ICRC, Wilson volunteered for Reliable Street for approximately 6 months, being asked to restore and help lead the development of a community garden designed by SHEPH (Students Helping End Poverty and Hunger), the Ames High School gardening club. When Wilson proposed native prairie restoration to surround the garden, she claims her plan was approved and the involved businesses and community were supportive.

Wilson is asking community members to step forth and do the right thing, “It is okay if you do not like me or my politics, but I absolutely don't deserve this. I want all parties involved to simply state the truth, although I'm scared people will be afraid to tell the truth or that they will be pressured into lying to protect the business's reputation, their job, or their friends. For my safety I really need people to step forward. I'm depending on people to value social justice and doing what is right above their own personal interests.”

“Before I filed, the Commission told me that complaints usually end up with a mediator who meets with both parties and talks through things. I was told that cases usually end in a settlement. That is all I wanted when I filed with them – to talk through what happened with Reliable Street and Lockwood Cafe because I was not given a clear explanation for why I was kicked off the property. I wanted open communication, but instead I got these unfair accusations against me which severely damage my reputation. I want my name cleared from these horrible allegations which could severely impact my business and personal life.”

Wilson has contacted multiple legal aid organizations around the state, but none of them take “fee-generating cases” (they only take tenant/landlord or divorce/custody cases). She also contacted numerous attorneys, stating “The cheapest quote I got was \$275/hour. There's no way I can afford this. I'm disappointed the Iowa Civil Rights Commission didn't investigate this further, and finding legal support in Iowa has been way more difficult than it should be.”

Dear Ames Community,

I really appreciate you taking the time to read this very heavy, sad article. I wrote in third person instead of first person in hopes to present a less biased perspective – it has been an emotionally excruciating experience that was easier for me to write about in this way.

If you were involved with the space at the time I was, and know enough about the situation to know that what happened to me was wrong, please contact me at adwilson8@dmacc.edu if you are willing to testify. I will not reveal your name because I don't want you to be punished for coming forward. Note that if you are threatened, that is a crime and I suggest you contact law enforcement.

I really wish neither I nor anyone in the Ames community had to deal with this, but it is not okay for people to have their safety threatened in retaliation for filing a civil rights complaint. I was told I was originally kicked off the property for “violating peoples' spaces”: yet no further explanation was given and this did not make sense to me. When I received no response to the letter I wrote to the owners, I filed a complaint with the Commission in hopes to find a mediator.

Please help. Assistance with legal fees may be donated via www.WildWillpower.org.

*Sincerely,
Sondra Wilson*